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# Freeway effect on air quality to be discussed at meeting

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The proposed South Mountain Freeway extension through Ahwatukee is one of several freeway projects that will be considered next week as part of an annual effort to ensure that transportation plans meet federal air quality standards.

But none likely will be pulled from Maricopa County's 20-year transportation plan or its five-year transportation improvement program.

The Maricopa Association of Governments is hosting a public meeting at 5 p.m. Monday at its offices, 302 N. 1st Ave., to discuss freeway construction and the impact on air quality.

Emissions from cars and trucks that would travel the proposed 22-mile stretch of the proposed South Mountain Freeway already have been taken into account as part of the Maricopa Association of Government's analysis, said Eric Anderson, MAG transportation director.

Opponents have criticized the long-planned freeway for generating too much traffic and pollution on the southern side of South Mountain.

But Anderson said expected emissions from the freeway wouldn't jeopardize the Valley's air quality rating, which must be considered as part of MAG's so-called conformity analysis.

In addition to the South Mountain Freeway, the analysis will consider air quality impacts from the nearly completed Red Mountain-Loop 202 Freeway, the proposed Gateway Freeway in southeast Mesa and other projects.

"This hearing is more clearly tied to the air quality conformity act," Anderson said.

No freeways included in the county's 20-year transportation plan are expected to be removed even under the looming threat of losing more than \$1 billion in federal freeway funds over the next five years if the county doesn't meet PM-10 dust, eight-hour ozone and carbon monoxide emissions standards.

State transportation planners are working on a draft environmental impact statement for the 10-lane South Mountain Freeway with an estimated cost of \$1.7 billion. The draft has been delayed for several years and is expected to be released in 2008.

After a public comment period, freeway planners will develop a final environmental impact statement and decide whether or not to build the freeway.

The "build" decision rests with the Arizona Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration. MAG will decide whether to fund it with a half-cent sales tax that voters approved in 1985 and renewed in 2004 to build the Loop 202 around the Valley and other transportation projects.

"If the decision is made not to build the South Mountain Freeway, we'd have to re-run the conformity analysis," Anderson said.

That could leave more room for other pollutants, such as dirt roads and emissions from fireplaces. Both are growing sources of pollution in the Valley.

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